



## Frequently Asked Questions Four-Year Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rate

March 20, 2012

### PURPOSE

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#### **Q. Why is a new graduation rate being reported?**

A. The U.S. Department of Education is requiring all states to begin publicly reporting comparable high school graduation rates using a four-year adjusted cohort rate calculation method. In October 2008, a regulation by the U. S. Department of Education [section 1111(h) of ESEA] was amended, which included a requirement for all states and local educational agencies (LEAs) to begin calculating and reporting the more uniform rate beginning with 2010-2011 data.

Historically, states have calculated graduation rates using varying methods, creating inconsistent data from one state to the next. The transition to a uniform high school graduation rate requires all states to report the percentage of freshmen students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma.

The four-year rate is helpful toward improving high school graduation rates by understanding the characteristics of the population of students who do not earn regular high school diplomas or who take longer than four years to graduate.

### DEFINITION

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#### **Q. How is the four-year graduation rate defined?**

A. The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of 9th grade, students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is subsequently “adjusted” by adding any students who transfer into the cohort later during the 9th grade and the next three years and subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during that same period.

#### **Q. How does the “new” graduation rate calculation differ with Montana's current rate?**

A. Montana has been transitioning to a cohort graduation rate, but four years of student-level enrollment data was required to fully implement the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. In 2007, Montana established unique IDs for all students in the state and implemented a system for tracking them over time and as they move between programs, schools and districts in the state. As of 2011, Montana has four years of enrollment data in the student information system, AIM, allowing the use of the four-year adjusted cohort formula.

**Q. What is a regular high school diploma?**

A. A regular high school diploma means the standard high school diploma awarded to students in Montana that is fully aligned with the state's academic standards and does not include a GED credential, certificate of attendance, or any alternative award.

## **REPORTING**

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**Q. How soon will the new four-year high school graduation rate be reported?**

A. In Montana, the new high school graduation rates are available as of February 2012.

**Q. How is the new graduation rate reported in Montana?**

A. The new four-year high school graduation rate is reported online at the Montana Office of Public Instruction website at [opi.mt.gov](http://opi.mt.gov).

**Q. How will students who graduate in five, six or more years be counted in the graduation rate?**

A. In addition to calculating a four-year adjusted cohort rate, Montana will also calculate an extended-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for five years and potentially for six years once data becomes available. Students who do not graduate in four years will lower the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, but if they graduate in the next year they will raise the five-year adjusted cohort rate. The five-year adjusted cohort rates will not be available until 2012, and the six-year rate will be available in 2013.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

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**Q. How will the new four-year high school graduation rate impact school districts' state and federal accountability requirements?**

A. The new rate for federal accountability purposes will go into effect across the nation for the 2011-12 school year. Montana's target AYP graduation rate goal is 85 percent for 2011-2012.

**Q. Are schools held accountable for students who transfer into the school but are not on schedule to graduate in four years?**

A. Yes, after a student has been claimed by a school in the AIM system, the claiming school has the responsibility of graduating the student with his/her cohort. If the student does not graduate with his/her cohort they will count as a non-graduate in the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. However, if the student graduates within five years, he/she will count as a graduate in the five-year adjusted cohort rate.

## COHORT INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

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**Q. Will a student who graduates early be counted as a graduate with the student's original freshman cohort?**

A. Yes. In the current implementation, the early graduate is included in the numerator along with the rest of that student's ninth-grade cohort graduates.

**Q. Will Montana count graduates who complete their coursework in the summer of their senior year?**

A. Yes. Montana seniors who catch up their credits during summer school can be reported as graduates and can therefore be counted as graduating on time.

**Q. If a student is held back or repeats a high school grade, do they enter a new cohort?**

A. A student who is held back will not enter a new cohort. He/she will be counted in the school's denominator and will not be in the numerator, unless that student accumulates enough credits and graduates within four years.

**Q. What if a student transfers to a new school after three years of high school, but is still only a sophomore?**

A. He/she will be counted in the new school's denominator and will not be in the numerator, unless that student accumulates enough credits and graduates within four years.

**Q. What if a student transfers in from a private school, home school, or out-of-state school and it is not possible to accurately determine when the student first became a freshman?**

A. The district that first enrolls the student will record the grade-level for that student. The student then enters that cohort.

**Q. How will transfers-in and transfers-out be treated within a freshman cohort?**

A. Students who transfer to another high school are entered into their new school's cohort, but transfer-outs leave the cohort. So, it will depend on when those students graduate whether there is a negative or positive impact on a school's graduation rate.

**Q. Are students who do not graduate within the four-year window considered dropouts?**

A. No, they are not considered a dropout, but they are not counted in the four-year high school graduation rate.

**Q. Will students who drop out and complete their GED be counted in the four-year graduation rate?**

A. Students who drop out of school and receive a GED certificate are not considered high school graduates and will not be included in the numerator. In an effort to reflect the achievements of students in a cohort, in future reports, OPI plans to report those students who received a GED.

**Q. If a student leaves for home school, will he/she count as a transfer?**

A. A student transferring to home school is a transfer-out, and he/she would leave a school's cohort, and thus not impact its four-year graduation rate.

**Additional References:**

- U.S. Department of Education, High School Graduation Rate, Non-regulatory Guidance (2008):  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/hsgrguidance.pdf>
- No Child Left Behind - Summary of Final Title I Regulations (2008):  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/reg/title1/summary.pdf>